

# GOD'S PASSION FOR HIS GLORY

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Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards

With the Complete Text of  
*The End for Which God Created the World*

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J O H N P I P E R

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*God's Passion for His Glory*

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TO  
JONATHAN EDWARDS

*“God is not the God of the dead  
but of the living; for all live to Him.”*

L U K E 2 0 : 3 8

The emanation or communication of the divine fullness, consisting in the knowledge of God, love to him, and joy in him, has relation indeed both to *God* and the *creature*: but it has relation to God as its *fountain*, as the thing communicated is something of its internal fullness. The water in the stream is something of the fountain; and the beams of the sun are something of the sun. And again, they have relation to God as their *object*: for the knowledge communicated is the knowledge of God; and the love communicated, is the love of God; and the happiness communicated, is joy in God. In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both *exhibited* and *acknowledged*, his fullness is *received* and *returned*. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God; and he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end.

JONATHAN EDWARDS  
*The End for Which God Created the World*

## P R E F A C E

**T**he longer I live, the more clearly I see my dependence on those who have gone before. The more I know of what others have thought, the less original my thinking appears. I am content to have it so. For, at least in the realm of truth, the ancient Preacher does not overstate the case when he says: “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

This book is witness to my calling as a secondary teacher, not a primary one. Jonathan Edwards is a primary teacher in the Christian church; I am secondary. The difference was described by Mortimer Adler in 1939:

[The secondary teacher] should regard himself as learning from the masters along with his [students]. He should not act as if he were a primary teacher, using a great book as if it were just another textbook of the sort one of his colleagues might write. He should not masquerade as one who knows and can teach by virtue of his original discoveries. . . . The primary sources of his own knowledge should be the primary sources of learning for his students, and such a teacher functions honestly only if he does not aggrandize himself by coming between the great books and their . . . readers. He should not “come between” as a nonconductor, but he should come between as a mediator—as one who helps the less competent make more effective contacts with the best minds.<sup>1</sup>

This is the role I want to play in relation to Jonathan Edwards and his book,<sup>2</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*. Jonathan Edwards is in a class by himself in American history, perhaps in the history of Christendom. This will become plain in the pages that follow. Paul Ramsey, the editor of Edwards’s *Ethical Writings*

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<sup>1</sup> Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, *The End for Which God Created the World* is half a book, since it was originally published in 1765 (seven years after Edwards’s death) as the first of a pair of treatises entitled *Two Dissertations*. The other of the two was *The Nature of True Virtue*. Edwards saw the two as a pair and envisioned them published together. See Part One, Chapter One, footnote 3, p. 22 for why I believe publishing *The End for Which God Created the World* alone is warranted.

in the Yale critical edition, agrees: "One studies the time and backgrounds of some men in order to understand them. Others have such rare greatness that one studies them in order to understand their times, or even to comprehend the deepest meaning of the intellectual and other influences that were effectual upon them. Jonathan Edwards was such an original."<sup>3</sup> It is not so much that Edwards dealt with new reality but, as Vergilius Ferm said, he "seemed to have had the powers and the drive to set his own stamp upon anything which came to his purview."<sup>4</sup>

But even more important than making all things his own in unique ways was his riveted focus on God, and his unwavering passion to see all that could be seen of God in this life. "To live with all my might, while I do live"<sup>5</sup> was his resolution. He applied it mainly to the pursuit of God. Thus he resolved again, "When I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances do not hinder." The channel where this passion for God flowed was the channel of unremitting, prayerful thinking on the truths of Scripture. Hence he resolved once more "to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same."

Which means in the end that Edwards too was a secondary teacher—as are all honest Christian pastors and theologians. "He was a man who put faithfulness to the Word of God before every other consideration."<sup>6</sup> Seeing the unlimited expanse of divine Reality that is really there in Scripture, not imagining new things, was his passion. Over every vast field of divine knowledge Edwards erected this banner: "I think the Word of God teaches us more things concerning it . . . than has been generally believed, and that it exhibits many things concerning it exceeding glorious and

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction" to *The Ethical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Vergilius Ferm, *Puritan Sage* (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> The seventy resolutions of the young Edwards are found in Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987) p. 471. If the reader desires a good starting point in the study of the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards, I recommend this biography very highly.

wonderful than have been taken notice of.”<sup>7</sup> In simple modern English: we have scarcely begun to see all of God that the Scriptures give us to see, and what we have not yet seen is exceedingly glorious.

Thus, in the most profound sense we are all secondary teachers and secondary beings. Only One is Primary. Why he created us, and how to join him in fulfilling that end, are the most important questions in the world. Only he can reveal the answer. That is why Jonathan Edwards gave himself to the Word of God and wrote *The End for Which God Created the World* (printed as Part Two of this book), and that is why I take my stand on his shoulders and write about *God’s Passion for His Glory*.

For over thirty years I have been trying to see and savor this God-centered, soul-satisfying, sin-destroying vision of reality. Part One of this book is a focused glimpse into the roots of this vision as I have come to see it in the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards. In the vein of other concerned evangelicals in our day,<sup>8</sup> Chapter One argues that modern evangelicalism is being doctrinally hollowed out by its love affair with pragmatism and numerical success. Edwards’s relentless God-centeredness and devotion to the Biblical contours of doctrine are profoundly needed in our day. In the second half of that chapter I offer fifteen summary statements of the implications of Edwards’s vision for Christian thought and life.

In Chapter Two the reader is given a mini-biography of Edwards. It’s a story that enables the reader to enjoy the man, and see his theology in the flow of his life and ministry. It puts flesh on the theological bones. Here you may meet “one of the most holy, humble and heavenly-minded men, that the world has seen, since the apostolic age” (Ashbel Green, President of the College of New

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *An Essay on the Trinity*, in: *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. by Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1971), pp. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); David Wells, *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 26.

Jersey, 1829), but also “the profoundest reasoner, and the greatest divine . . . that America ever produced” (Samuel Davies, 1759)—a man who was “greatest in his attribute of regnant permeating, irradiating spirituality” (John De Witt, 1912).<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter Three I take the reader on a personal tour along my thirty-year path of discovering the major writings of Jonathan Edwards. In this way I try to combine my own personal story with the life and writings of Edwards to show their meaning and relevance for at least one modern evangelical. My hope is that you will see at work in this chapter not just one, but two illustrations—one living and one dead—of “A Mind in Love with God.”

Finally, in Chapter Four, I take up Edwards’s radically God-centered view of virtue—which is, in fact, the end for which God created the world—and apply its scathing relevance to cultural transformation and world evangelization. The rediscovery of Edwards’s God-centered moral vision in *The End for Which God Created the World* is my aim. And I pray that this endeavor will serve the purpose of God in our day to fill the hollow sounds of our God-neglect and its fatal successes. May the Lord restore a passion for truth and a passion for his glory, which has largely “disappeared from the modern evangelical world.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> These quotes are taken from Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), pp. vx-vxii.

<sup>10</sup> “It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world” (David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p. 300).

P A R T   O N E

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A PERSONAL  
ENCOUNTER WITH  
JONATHAN EDWARDS

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*by John Piper*



No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards.

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES  
*The Puritan Experiment in the New World*

Edwards's *piety* continued on in the revivalist tradition, his *theology* continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.

MARK NOLL  
"Jonathan Edwards's Moral Philosophy,  
and the Secularization of American Christian Thought"  
in *The Reformed Journal*

It is my belief that the prayers and work of those who love and obey Christ in our world may yet prevail as they keep the message of such a man as Jonathan Edwards.

CHARLES COLSON  
"Introduction"  
to Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*

The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.

JONATHAN EDWARDS  
*The End for Which God Created the World*

*The End for Which God Created the World* [is] . . .  
unsurpassed in terms of its theological grandeur.

DAVID BRAND  
*Profile of the Last Puritan*

## CHAPTER ONE

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# THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD WHY PUBLISH AN OLD BOOK?

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*A Personal and Public Concern*

The message of Jonathan Edwards in *The End for Which God Created the World* is an intensely personal concern for me and a word of great public significance. In that book, a vision of God is displayed that took me captive thirty years ago and has put its stamp on every part of my life and ministry. But, more important than my own experience, is the immense significance of Edwards's vision of God for the wider public of our day.

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### SECTION ONE

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#### *An American Tragedy*

Jonathan Edwards is one of the great fathers of evangelical Christianity in America. But it is a great tragedy, as Mark Noll observes, that “the theocentric emphasis of Edwards has played a remarkably small role in the history of evangelical Protestants.”<sup>1</sup> There are reasons for this. Partly it is because our whole culture is

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, “God at the Center: Jonathan Edwards on True Virtue,” *Christian Century*, September 8-15, 1993, p. 857.

inhospitable to such a radically God-centered vision of life. Noll argues that since Edwards's day 250 years ago,

evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians, because their entire culture has ceased to do so. Edwards's *piety* continued on in the revivalist tradition, his *theology* continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

### *Unsurpassed in Theological Grandeur*

This is why the publication of *The End for Which God Created the World* is a cultural, religious, and evangelical concern. Edwards's book (together with *True Virtue*<sup>3</sup>), Noll suggests, is "perhaps the best place to encounter both the breathtaking vision of divine glory and the human strain required to take in that vision."<sup>4</sup> I agree. So does David Brand in his book, *Profile of the Last Puritan. The End for Which God Created the World*, he says,

<sup>2</sup> Mark Noll, "Jonathan Edwards's Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," *Reformed Journal*, February, 1983, p. 26. Noll, who teaches at Wheaton College, summarized Edwards's unusual juxtapositions in another place: "Although his biography presents many dramatic contrasts, these were in reality only different facets of a common allegiance to a sovereign God. Thus, Edwards both preached ferocious hell-fire sermons and expressed lyrical appreciations of nature because the God who created the world in all its beauty was also perfect in holiness. Edwards combined herculean intellectual labors with child-like piety because he perceived God as both infinitely complex and blissfully simple. In his Northampton church his consistent exaltation of divine majesty led to very different results—he was first lionized as a great leader and then dismissed from his pulpit. Edwards held that the omnipotent deity required repentance and faith from his human creatures so he proclaimed both the absolute sovereignty of God and the urgent responsibilities of men" (Caption under Edwards's portrait in *Christian History*, vol. iv, no. 4, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue* were intended by Edwards to be published together. See Part Two, footnote 53, and Preface footnote 3. In spite of Edwards's intention that the *Two Dissertations* (the title given to the first edition in 1765) go together, there is little doubt that they are two and not one. Therefore I have felt free to publish *The End for Which God Created the World* on its own, especially in view of several other factors. For example, most criticism has been leveled against reading *True Virtue* without reading *The End* rather than vice versa, because *True Virtue* does not deal with Scripture, and some have argued that Edwards moved away from his Biblical base into a mere philosophical concern. The answer to this is that his Scripture argumentation was provided in Part Two of *The End for Which God Created the World* and is presupposed in *True Virtue*. Not only that, the main point of *True Virtue* is essentially contained in *The End for Which God Created the World*. Finally, *True Virtue* has already been published in a single volume, so that the need to make it accessible is not so great. *The Nature of True Virtue*, ed. by William Frankena (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960). Of course both treatises are available in the more expensive Banner of Truth edition (vol. 1) and Yale edition (vol. 8) of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>4</sup> "God at the Center," p. 858.

is “a work which I have come to regard as unsurpassed in terms of its theological grandeur.”<sup>5</sup>

My prayer is that the evangelical church today would stand in awe of the “breath-taking vision of divine glory” declared with “theological grandeur” in *The End for Which God Created the World*. This is one reason why I have undertaken to publish the book below on pages 115-251.

### *Hard and Helpful for Impatient Pragmatists*

The difficulties that stand in the way of seeing this vision are daunting, but hopeful. They are daunting because, as Noll hinted, “the human strain required to take in that vision” is immense. The book is hard to read. It was hard to read in its own day<sup>6</sup> and it is harder today. Americans, as a whole (and evangelicals are little different in this), are not given to thinking much, let alone thinking at the level Edwards demands of us. This is especially true about doctrine. We are pragmatic. We demand quick solutions. We define success in measurable quantities. We have little patience with doctrinal precision. And we pastors who are infected with the pragmatic virus tend to justify our indifference to doctrine mainly by the fact that such reflection is not what the audience is looking for. Besides, it is stressful for relationships.

The recent lamentations<sup>7</sup> over the drift of evangelicalism into pragmatic, doctrinally vague, audience-driven, culturally uncritical Christianity are, in my judgment, warranted and needed, in spite of the fact that, at the level of professional scholarship, there have been remarkable advances in the last fifty years.<sup>8</sup> As a whole, and in the dominant shaping forces of evangelicalism, the criticism

<sup>5</sup> *Profile of the Last Puritan: Jonathan Edwards, Self-Love, and the Dawn of the Beatific* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), p. x.

<sup>6</sup> The original preface in the 1765 edition says, “Some readers may find the labor hard to keep pace with the writer, in the advances he makes, when the ascent is arduous.” *Two Dissertations*, in *Ethical Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 402.

<sup>7</sup> This view of the state of thinking in evangelicalism is laid out in Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), David Wells, *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

<sup>8</sup> For a balancing, more positive, portrait of evangelicalism see Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

of Harry Blamires in 1963 is probably more true than ever: “There is no Christian Mind. . . . The Christian Mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness unmatched in Christian History.”<sup>9</sup>

The increasing abandonment of truth and moral absolutes<sup>10</sup> in our culture, as militant diversity threatens all firm conviction, has dramatically influenced the evangelical mindset. The political spin doctors who specialize in deflecting attention away from truth onto feelings and relationships and styles have their counterpart in the evangelical tendency to avoid doctrinal disputes by casting issues in terms of demeanor and method rather than truth. Serious disagreements are covered over, while vague language and pragmatic concerns preserve hollow unity at the expense of theological substance and Biblical clarity and power.

### *A Voice of Lament from Sri Lanka*

The lament over the pragmatic hollowing out of evangelical conviction may be felt with unusual poignancy when it comes, not just from the intellectual elite, but from a person like Ajith Fernando, who leads Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka. He not only delivers solid exposition around the world, but also works among the poor and has wept over the horrors of 50,000 casualties of insurgency in one year of Sri Lanka’s unrest. That was 1989, and he says, simply, “I struggled much with despair that year.”<sup>11</sup>

His strength, he says, came from the truth, and in that context he laments what he sees happening in the West: “A major shift . . . has taken place in western evangelicalism where truth has been replaced by pragmatism as the major influencer of thought and life. This path is suicidal.” He is heartened that voices are being raised, but then he says, “However, I feel that many evangelical leaders are so caught up in and blinded by this bondage to pragmatism that even though they may heartily endorse pleas to return to

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<sup>9</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (London: SPCK, 1963), pp. vii, 3.

<sup>10</sup> David Wells records in 1998 that 67% of Americans do not believe in moral absolutes and 70% do not believe in absolute truth—truth that should be believed by all people in all places and all times. David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), p. 117.

greater dependence on truth, endorsements make minimal inroads into their ministry styles and strategies.”<sup>12</sup> There is simply too little patience with the particularities of Biblical propositions that embody precious, life-sustaining doctrine.

### *So Much of Man, So Little of God*

Jonathan Edwards had a profound insight into this very state of affairs, and it has to do directly with the absence of God-centeredness: “It is one great reason why speculative points [of doctrine] are thought to be of so little importance, that the modern religion consists so little in respect to the divine Being, and almost wholly in benevolence to men.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the sickness that needs healing is the main hindrance to the remedy.

This means that Jonathan Edwards’s “grand style of feeling and thinking is not ours and is alien to our way of life.”<sup>14</sup> Edwards’s utter seriousness—his “blood-earnestness,” as Thomas Chalmers called it—puts him out of sync with our chatty, humorous, entertainment-oriented, cartoon-illustrated spirituality.<sup>15</sup> Edwards’s sense of the desperate condition of mankind without God is so weighty that it takes our breath away. H. Richard Niebuhr commented that Edwards’s awareness of the precariousness of life put him in a rare class: “He recognized what Kierkegaard meant when he described life as treading water with ten thousand fathoms beneath us.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Supremacy of Christ*, pp. 112-113. From another standpoint, Henri Nouwen, the popular Catholic writer on spirituality, gave a similar critique of the wider religious scene. “Few ministers and priests think theologically. Most of them have been educated in a climate in which the behavioral sciences, such as psychology and sociology, so dominated the educational milieu that no true theology was being learned. Most Christian leaders today raise psychological and sociological questions even though they frame them in scriptural terms. Real theological thinking, which is thinking with the mind of Christ, is hard to find in the practice of ministry. Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologists, pseudo-sociologists, pseudo-social workers. They will think of themselves as enablers, facilitators, role models, father or mother figures, big brothers or big sisters, and so on, and thus join the countless men and women trying to help their fellow human beings to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living. But that has little to do with Christian leadership.” Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1949), p.118.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Haroutunian, “Preface” to *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, by Douglas J. Elwood (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. x.

<sup>15</sup> J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust), p. 264.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Douglas J. Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 4.

### *We Need So Much More Than Benjamin Franklin*

But at this very point the daunting difficulties in seeing Edwards's great vision of God may give way to hope. It may be that the theological impoverishment of the American church, and the precariousness of life, and the weariness with "successful" superficiality will make the voice of Jonathan Edwards more compelling than he has been for centuries.

Several others have held out this hope as they have contrasted the influence of Edwards and his contemporary Benjamin Franklin. Randall Stewart argues that

Franklin started us on the road which has led to a gadgeteers' paradise. But now that it is becoming startlingly clear that gadgets can't save us, and may all too readily destroy us . . . now that Dr. Franklin's lightning rod begins to look, from one viewpoint, like a pathetic symbol of human pride and inadequacy, while Edwards's soul-probings seem more searching to this generation of readers perhaps than they have ever seemed before, it is possible that Edwards will yet emerge, is already emerging, as the more useful, the more truly helpful, of the two.<sup>17</sup>

Perry Miller, who professed no share in Edwards's faith, had a similar view of our condition: "[Edwards] is a reminder that, although our civilization has chosen to wander in the more genial meadows to which Franklin beckoned it, there come periods, either through disaster or through self-knowledge, when applied science and Benjamin Franklin's *The Way to Wealth* seem not a sufficient philosophy of national life."<sup>18</sup> That statement, made in 1949, seems to me like a thunderous understatement as the century closes. Franklin's pragmatism is theologically, morally, and spiritually bankrupt. That very cultural bankruptcy may awaken evangelicals from the folly of imitation.

### *Edwards vs. "Enlightened Human Intelligence"*

In the heyday of nineteenth-century optimism, Oliver Wendell Holmes scoffed at Edwards's convictions as

<sup>17</sup> Randall Stewart, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. xiii.

not only false, not only absurd, but . . . *disorganizing forces* in the midst of the thinking apparatus. Edwards's system seems, in the light of today, to the last degree barbaric, mechanical, materialistic, pessimistic. If he had lived a hundred years later, and breathed the air of freedom, he could not have written with such old-world barbarism. . . . The truth is that [his] whole system of beliefs . . . is gently fading out of enlightened human intelligence, and we are hardly in a condition to realize what a tyranny it once exerted over many of the strongest minds.<sup>19</sup>

Edwards's vision has not faded. It is being recovered and reconsidered more extensively and with more vigor today, perhaps, than at any time since his own day.<sup>20</sup> The reason Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote him off, and the reason there is hope that we may not, is that our century has shown Holmes's "enlightened human intelligence" to be the factory of the greatest global evils ever perpetrated in human history. Mark Noll comments, "Since most of the 20th century has been such a [dark] period, we may be in a position to hear Edwards more clearly than was the progressive generation of Holmes."<sup>21</sup> In other words, in this case, the disease may make the remedy intelligible.

### *C. S. Lewis on the Necessity of Old Books*

C. S. Lewis points to another reason we might see our darkening days as a hopeful opening to Edwards's *End for Which God Created the World*. Lewis was born in 1898 and died the same day as John F. Kennedy in 1963. His life was virtually coextensive with the twentieth century up to that point. From that perspective he

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Mark Noll, "God at the Center," p. 856.

<sup>20</sup> "Interest in Edwards—and especially his theology—may be higher now than it ever has been, even in his own day. Edwards's biographer, M. X. Lesser, has estimated that the number of academic dissertations on Edwards has doubled every decade over the last forty years. The three-volume *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, published by Scribner's in 1988, contains far more references to Edwards than to any other single figure" (Mark Noll, "God at the Center," p. 857). How fickle history is in her judgments may be seen from the fact that when Samuel Hopkins, Edwards's friend, published the *Two Dissertations* in 1765, as well as some sermons and his own *Life of Edwards*, the response was so poor that he gave up publishing more of Edwards's works and his *Life of Edwards* was not sought out in America for another forty years. Murray comments: "Edwards was not regarded in his own age, in his own country, with the general esteem which he received at a later period" (Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 449).

<sup>21</sup> "God at the Center," p. 856.



said, "I have lived nearly sixty years with myself and my own century and am not so enamoured of either as to desire no glimpse of a world beyond them."<sup>22</sup> Yes, and if he had lived to the end of the century, he would have been even less enamored of his own century than at the halfway mark.

From this Lewis goes on to stress that he wants and needs to read books from outside his own century. His reasons may open the wise to read Jonathan Edwards.

There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should be read only by the professionals, and that the amateur should content himself with the modern books. . . . This mistaken preference for the modern books and this shyness of the old ones is nowhere more rampant than in theology. . . . Now this seems to me topsy-turvy. Naturally, since I myself am a writer, I do not wish the ordinary reader to read no modern books. But if he must read only the new or only the old, I would advise him to read the old. . . . It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones. . . . We all . . . need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. . . . We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century . . . lies where we have never suspected it. . . . None of us can fully escape this blindness. . . . The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.<sup>23</sup>

If Lewis is right, the very foreignness of Edwards's greatness is a hope-filled reason to read him. Yes, his way of writing is elevated; ours tends to be mundane and conversational. His thought is complex; ours tends to be elementary. His vision of reality is steadily

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted from *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, in *The Quotable Lewis*, ed. by Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989), p. 509.

<sup>23</sup> C. S. Lewis, "On The Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 200-207. This essay was first published as the introduction to St. Athanasius' *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, trans. by A. Religious of C.S.M.V (London, 1944), pp. 200-202.

God-centered; ours tends to be man-centered with occasional attention to God. He is relentlessly serious; we incline to light-heartedness and comic relief. He is truth-focused and cherishes the contours of doctrine; we tend to be feeling-focused and suspicious of the claim that doctrine has contours. Yes, but in spite of all that—and Lewis would say, *because of all that*—the effort to read Edwards would be well spent.

### *Mortimer Adler on the Necessity of Hard Books*

Mortimer Adler would use another argument to persuade us. In his classic, *How to Read a Book*, he makes a passionate case that the books that enlarge our grasp of truth and make us wiser must feel, at first, beyond us. They “must make demands on you. They must seem to you to be beyond your capacity.”<sup>24</sup> If a book is easy and fits nicely into all your language conventions and thought forms, then you probably will not grow much from reading it. It may be entertaining, but not enlarging to your understanding. It’s the hard books that count. Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.

Evangelical Christians, who believe God reveals himself primarily through a book, the Bible, should long to be the most able readers they can be. This means that we should want to become clear, penetrating, accurate, fair-minded thinkers, because all good reading involves asking questions and thinking.<sup>25</sup> This is one reason why the Bible teaches us, “Do not be children in your *thinking*; be babes in evil, but in *thinking* be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20 RSV). It’s why Paul said to Timothy, “*Think over* what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything” (2 Tim. 2:7). God’s gift of understanding is through thinking, not instead of thinking.<sup>26</sup>

Adler underlines his plea for the “major exertion” of reading

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<sup>24</sup> Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 339.

<sup>25</sup> “Reading a book on any level beyond the elementary is essentially an effort on our part to ask it questions (and to answer them to the best of our ability). . . . That is why there is all the difference in the world between the demanding and the undemanding reader. The latter asks no questions—and gets no answers” (*How to Read a Book*, p. 47).

<sup>26</sup> For an expanded meditation on 2 Timothy 2:7, see John Piper, *A Godward Life: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1997), pp. 122-123.

great books with the warning that such mental exercise may lengthen your life, and television may be deadly.

The mind can atrophy, like the muscles, if it is not used. . . . And this is a terrible penalty, for there is evidence that atrophy of the mind is a mortal disease. There seems to be no other explanation for the fact that so many busy people die so soon after retirement. . . . Television, radio, and all the sources of amusement and information that surround us in our daily lives are . . . artificial props. They can give us the impression that our minds are active, because we are required to react to stimuli from outside. But the power of those external stimuli to keep us going is limited. They are like drugs. We grow used to them, and we continuously need more and more of them. Eventually, they have little or no effect.<sup>27</sup>

### *The Climb Will Be Worth It*

Making the effort to read Jonathan Edwards merely for the sake of living longer would be a great irony. His aim is not to help us live long, nor even to live forever, but to help us live for God and *that* forever. And since our media-intoxicated culture is neither given to thinking, nor to straining Godward, the challenge and the potential of reading Edwards is doubled. *The End for Which God Created the World* may prove to be a life-giving fountain in more ways than we know—all the better for its mountain-height, and all the strain to climb worthwhile.

### *Attempting a Luther-like Copernican Revolution*

In all this I long to persuade you to read and embrace Jonathan Edwards's *The End for Which God Created the World*. The public significance of this vision of God, known and embraced, would be epoch-making. Mark Noll compares Edwards's effort in this book to the aim of Martin Luther, who turned the world upside-down by restoring God to his rightful place. It "attempt[s] in the 18th century what Philip Watson once described as Martin Luther's main concern in the 16th century—the promotion of a

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<sup>27</sup> *How to Read a Book*, pp. 345-346.

theological ‘Copernican Revolution’ in which anthropocentric instincts are transformed into a theocentric picture of reality.”<sup>28</sup>

Edwards is strongest where we are weakest. He knows God. He sees and savors the supremacy of God in all things. Our culture is dying for want of this vision and this food. And, therefore, the publication of *The End for Which God Created the World* is a matter of great public significance.

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## SECTION TWO

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### *A Personal Concern*

Publishing *The End for Which God Created the World* is also an intensely personal concern for me. As I said at the beginning, the vision of God displayed in that book took me captive thirty years ago and has put its stamp on every part of my life and ministry. I believe and love its message. My personal reason for making the book more accessible is to join God in pursuing the invincible end for which he created the world. That end, Edwards says, is, first, that the glory of God might be magnified in the universe, and, second, that Christ’s ransomed people from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things.

### *God’s Glory Manifest in the Happiness of the Saints*

But the depth and wonder and power of this book is the demonstration that these two ends are one. The *rejoicing* of all peoples in God, and the *magnifying* of God’s glory are one end, not two. Why this is so, how it can be, and what difference it makes is what this book, and my life and Jonathan Edwards’s theology, are about. The first biographer of Edwards describes *The End for Which God Created the World* like this: “From the purest principles of reason, as well as from the fountain of revealed truth, he demonstrates that the *chief* and *ultimate* end of the Supreme Being, in the works of creation and providence, was the manifestation of his own glory in the highest happiness of his creatures.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “God at the Center,” pp. 855. Noll makes this claim for the combined impact of *The End for Which God Created the World* along with *The Treatise on True Virtue*.

<sup>29</sup> Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. clxiii.

“The manifestation of his own glory in the highest happiness of his creatures.” Virtually everything I preach and write and do is shaped by this truth: that the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing. It has been a thirty-year quest, since I was first awakened to this vision through C. S. Lewis<sup>30</sup> and Daniel Fuller.<sup>31</sup> The quest goes on. But, over time, my most experienced and reliable guide in the Himalayas of Holy Scripture has been Jonathan Edwards. He said it like this: “The end of the creation is that the creation might glorify [God]. Now what is glorifying God, but a rejoicing at that glory he has displayed?”<sup>32</sup> “The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.”<sup>33</sup>

The implications of this vision are far-reaching. After spending thirty years pursuing the high paths of God’s written revelation, I feel like I am just beginning to breathe the air of this lofty reality. Not to make you ferret out all the implications for yourself, I will mention in what follows fifteen of them. Keep in mind what I am illustrating. The further up you go in the revealed thoughts of God, the clearer you see that God’s aim in creating the world was to display the value of his own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of his people in that glory.

### *How Does Edwards Say It?*

Let Edwards speak again for himself on this issue. How are God’s glory and your joy related? He says it in many ways:

<sup>30</sup> I tell the story of the key encounters with C. S. Lewis in *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1996), pp. 16-19. One of the most awakening sentences of my life has proved to be, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation” (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958], p. 95).

<sup>31</sup> The importance of Fuller’s impact is narrated in the foreword which I wrote to his book *Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), pp. x-xii. David Brand pays tribute to the same impact of Edwards through Daniel Fuller in his excellent book, *Profile of the Last Puritan*, p. x.

<sup>32</sup> Miscellany #3 in: Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, ed. by Thomas Schafer, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 199. The Miscellanies are Edwards’s private notebooks where he did his thinking, which later made its way into his sermons and books. The date for Miscellany #3 is estimated to be from Edwards’s twentieth year. See Schafer’s dating efforts in *The Miscellanies*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>33</sup> See below, *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 72 and footnote 40.

God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory . . . implies the . . . happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself, *i.e.* himself diffused . . . he seeks their glory and happiness.<sup>34</sup>

Thus it is easy to conceive how God should seek the good of the creature . . . even his happiness, from a supreme regard to *himself*; as his happiness arises from . . . the creature's exercising a supreme regard to God . . . in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it.<sup>35</sup>

God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing. The implications of this are breathtaking. I mention fifteen in acorn-form. Any one of them could become a great oak tree with book-length branches.

### *Two Great Passions Not at Odds*

**Implication #1.** *God's passion for his own glory and his passion for my joy in him are not at odds.* God's righteousness<sup>37</sup> is not the enemy of his mercy. His commitment to uphold the worth of his name does not consign me to destruction, though I have besmeared

<sup>34</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 114.

<sup>35</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 277.

<sup>36</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 278.

<sup>37</sup> God's righteousness is his unwavering commitment to uphold and display the infinite worth of his glory in all that he does, which would seem to require punishment for all who have "fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But since God's righteousness (his commitment to his glory) and his mercy (his commitment to our joy) are not ultimately at odds, he made a way to "be both just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). See footnote 21 in Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, p. 141.

his name by indifference and distrust. Rather, in the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, God conspired to vindicate his righteousness and justify sinners in one act. Which means that his zeal to be glorified and his zeal to save sinners are one.<sup>38</sup>

### *God Is Committed to the Joy of the Saints*

**Implication #2.** *Therefore, God is as committed to my eternal and ever-increasing joy in him as he is to his own glory.* This gives us a glimpse into the massive theological substructure beneath some of the sweetest promises in the Bible—the ones that say God exerts omnipotent zeal to do us good. For example, 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him” (RSV). Psalm 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue<sup>39</sup> me all the days of my life” (author’s translation). Zephaniah 3:17, “The LORD your God . . . will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” Luke 12:32, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (RSV).<sup>40</sup>

### *The Essence of God’s Love for You*

**Implication #3.** *The love of God for sinners is not his making much of them, but his graciously freeing and empowering them to enjoy*

<sup>38</sup> See especially Romans 3:25-26, “God displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” See my exposition of this text in the wider Biblical context of this truth in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991), pp. 160-184.

<sup>39</sup> The traditional translation “follow” in Psalm 23:6 misses the uniform meaning of the Hebrew *radaph*, namely “pursue, chase or persecute.” The verse does not mean that God’s goodness and mercy follow us as though we were leaders and they were loyal subjects. It means they pursue us as though we were in constant need of omnipotent help—which we are. Daniel Fuller captures the force of this verse: “In that his goodness and mercy pursue after his people every day of their lives (see Ps. 23:6), God himself is modeling the benevolent love of 1 Corinthians 10:24: ‘Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.’ But this seeking the welfare of the creature does not contradict the oft-stated affirmation in Scripture that ‘to [God] be the glory for ever! Amen’ (e.g., Rom. 11:36), for the blessing of knowing God, enjoyed by believing people as his mercy and goodness pursue them daily, causes their hearts to well up constantly in praise to him” (*Unity of the Bible*, p. 136).

<sup>40</sup> See *The End for Which God Created the World*, Chapter Two, Section Five (§§ 226-240) for Edwards’s collection of Biblical texts that show God created the world with a view to pursuing the creature’s good.

*making much of him.* As Edwards says, “God is their good.” Therefore if God would do us good, he must direct us to his worth, not ours. The truth that God’s glory and our joy in God are one radically undermines modern views of self-centered love. God-centered grace nullifies the gospel of self-esteem. Today, people typically feel loved if you make much of them and help them feel valued. The bottom line in their happiness is that they are made much of.

Edwards observes, with stunning modern relevance, “True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with . . . the things of God. But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: they first rejoice . . . that they are made so much of by God; and then on that ground, he seems in a sort, lovely to them.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, in his view, the bottom line of happiness is that we are granted to see the infinite beauty of God and make much of him forever. Human beings do, in fact, have more value than the birds (Matt. 6:26). But that is not the bottom line of our happiness. It simply means that we were created to magnify God’s glory by enjoying him in a way birds never can.

### *What Is the Essence of True Virtue?*

**Implication #4.** If the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *all true virtue among human beings must aim at bringing people to rejoice in the glory of God.* No act is truly virtuous—that is, truly loving—that does not come from and aim at joy in the glory of God. The ground for this truth is laid in Edwards’s *The End for Which God Created the World*, but the exposition of it was given in *The Nature of True Virtue* which Edwards wrote at the same time (1755) and intended to publish bound together with *The End* in one volume. There he said, “If there could be . . . a cause determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind . . . exclusive of . . . love to God, . . . it cannot be of the nature of true virtue.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, ed. by John Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 249-250.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in *Ethical Writings*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 602-603.



The reason for this sweeping indictment of God-neglecting “virtue” is not hard to see in Edward’s God-centered universe: “So far as a virtuous mind exercises true virtue in benevolence to created beings, it chiefly seeks the good of the creature, consisting in its knowledge or view of God’s glory and beauty, its union with God, and conformity to him, love to him, and joy in him.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, if God’s glory is the only all-satisfying reality in the universe, then to try to do good for people, without aiming to show them the glory of God and ignite in them a delight in God, would be like treating fever with cold packs when you have penicillin. The apostle Paul warns that I can “give all my possessions to feed the poor, and . . . deliver my body to be burned,” and still “not have love” (1 Cor. 13:3). The final reason for this is that man is not the center of true virtue, God is. So “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:13).

### *Sin Is Sacrilege and Suicide*

**Implication #5.** *It also follows that sin is the suicidal exchange of the glory of God for the broken cisterns of created things.* Paul said, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sinning is a “falling short” of the glory of God. But the Greek word for “falling short” (*husterountai*) means “lack.” The idea is not that you shot an arrow at God’s glory and the arrow fell short, but that you could have had it as a treasure, but you don’t. You have chosen something else instead. This is confirmed in Romans 1:23 where people “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image.” That is the deepest problem with sin: it is a suicidal exchange of infinite value and beauty for some fleeting, inferior substitute. This is the great insult.

In the words of Jeremiah, God calls it appalling. “Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate, declares the LORD. For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:12-13). What is the essence of evil? It is forsaking a living fountain for broken cisterns. God gets derision and we get death. They are one:

<sup>43</sup> *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 559.

in choosing sugarcoated misery we mock the lifegiving God. It was meant to be another way: God's glory exalted in our everlasting joy.

*Ever-increasing Joy in an Inexhaustible God*

**Implication #6.** *Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and ever-greater joy in him.* If God's glory and our joy in him are one, and yet we are not infinite as he is, then our union with him in the all-satisfying experience of his glory can never be complete, but must be increasing with intimacy and intensity forever and ever. The perfection of heaven is not static. Nor do we see at once all there is to see—for that would be a limit on God's glorious self-revelation, and therefore, his love. Yet we do not become God. Therefore, there will always be more, and the end of increased pleasure in God will never come.

Here is the way Edwards puts it: "I suppose it will not be denied by any, that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good [which is] infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that *now* this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, he says, our eternal rising into more and more of God will be a "rising higher and higher through that infinite duration, and . . . not with constantly diminishing (but perhaps an increasing) celerity [that is, velocity] . . . [to an] infinite height; though there never will be any particular time when it can be said already to have come to such a height."<sup>45</sup> This is what we see through a glass darkly in Ephesians 2:7, "[God seats us in heaven with Christ] so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." It will take an infinite number of ages for God to be done glorifying the wealth of his grace to us—which is to say he will never be done.

<sup>44</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 285.

<sup>45</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 279. See footnote 45 in *The End for Which God Created the World*, p. 160.

### *When Creatures Refuse to Be Happy in God*

**Implication #7.** *Hell is unspeakably real, conscious, horrible and eternal—the experience in which God vindicates the worth of his glory in holy wrath on those who would not delight in what is infinitely glorious.* If infinitely valuable glory has been spurned, and the offer of eternal joy in God has been finally rejected, an indignity against God has been committed so despicable as to merit eternal suffering. Thus, Edwards says, “God aims at satisfying justice in the eternal damnation of sinners; which will be satisfied by their damnation, considered no otherwise than with regard to its eternal duration. But yet there never will come that particular moment, when it can be said, that now justice is satisfied.”<sup>46</sup> Of the love of God and the wrath of God, Edwards says simply, “Both will be unspeakable.”<sup>47</sup>

The words of Jesus and the words of his apostle confirm this: it will be unspeakable. Thus the Lord said, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:41, 46). And Saint Paul said that when Jesus returns, he will come “dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus [which means joyfully trusting the all-sufficient love of God in Christ]. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

### *Evangelism: Laboring to Waken a Taste for God*

**Implication #8.** If the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *evangelism means depicting the*

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<sup>46</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 285. For the Biblical evidence of hell's eternal conscious torment and the justice of it, see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 115-128; and Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), pp. 668-669; and Jonathan Edwards, “The Torments of Hell Are Exceeding Great,” *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, ed. by Kenneth Minkema, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 297-328.

<sup>47</sup> Unpublished sermon on Exodus 9:12, quoted in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 3. This entire book illustrates Edwards's capacity to show that heaven is unspeakably wonderful and hell is unspeakably horrible.

*beauty of Christ and his saving work with a heartfelt urgency of love that labors to help people find their satisfaction in him.* The most important common ground with unbelievers is not culture but creation, not momentary felt needs but massive real needs.<sup>48</sup> Augustine's famous prayer is all important: "You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you."<sup>49</sup> If a person realizes that the *image of God* in man is man's ineffably profound fitness to image forth Christ's glory through everlasting joy in God, then he will not gut the great gospel of its inner life and power.

The gospel is not the good news that God makes much of me; it is "the gospel of *the glory of Christ.*" And evangelism, St. Paul says, is the outshining of "*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*" (2 Cor. 4:4). And when, by the agency of prayer and witness and the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, unbelievers suddenly see the glory of God in Christ and rejoice in hope, it is because the Creator of the universe "has shone in [their] hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Our evangelistic task is not to persuade people that the gospel was made for their felt needs, but that they were made for the soul-satisfying glory of God in the gospel.

### *Preaching: Luring out People to God*

**Implication #9.** *Similarly, Christian preaching, as part of the corporate worship of Christ's church, is an expository exultation over the glories of God in his word, designed to lure God's people from the fleeting pleasures of sin into the sacrificial path of obedient satisfaction in him.* If preaching should aim to magnify God, and if God is magnified when his people prefer him over all "the riches and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14), then preaching must aim to

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<sup>48</sup> I owe this way of saying it to David Wells in personal conversation. Few people today are making wiser, more penetrating observations about this distinction than Wells in his three books, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 21, (1, 1).

expose the suicidal pleasures of sin and waken fullness of joy in God. The ever-present refrain will be,

*Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money, come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost.  
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourself in abundance.  
Incline your ear and come to Me.  
Listen, that you may live.  
(Isaiah 55:1-3)*

When Edwards pondered the aims of preaching for the glory of God he said, “I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.”<sup>50</sup> High affections rooted in, and proportioned by, the truth—that is the goal of preaching. The truth is the manifold glory of God in his word; and the high affections are the delight of knowing God and the dread of not being happy in him. “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart . . . therefore you shall serve your enemies” (Deut. 28:47-48).

### ***Corporate Worship: The Heart Hunger That Honors God***

**Implication #10.** *The essence of authentic, corporate worship is the collective experience of heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, or a trembling that we do not have it and a great longing for it. Worship is for the sake of magnifying God, not ourselves, and God is magnified in us when we are satisfied in him. Therefore, the unchanging essence of worship (not the outward forms which do change) is heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, the trembling when we do not have it and the longing for it.*

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival, The Great Awakening*, ed. by C. C. Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 387.

The basic movement of worship on Sunday morning is not to come with our hands full to give to God, as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25), but to come with our hands empty, to receive from God. And what we receive in worship is the fullness of God, not the feelings of entertainment. We ought to come hungry for God. We should come saying, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1-2). God is mightily honored when a people know that they will die of hunger and thirst unless they have God.

Nothing makes God more supreme and more central in worship than when a people are utterly persuaded that nothing—not money or prestige or leisure or family or job or health or sports or toys or friends—nothing is going to bring satisfaction to their sinful, guilty, aching hearts besides God. This conviction breeds a people who go hard after God on Sunday morning. They are not confused about why they are in a worship service. They do not view songs and prayers and sermons as mere traditions or mere duties. They see them as means of getting to God or God getting to them for more of his fullness—no matter how painful that may be for sinners in the short run.

If the focus in corporate worship shifts onto our giving to God, one result I have seen again and again is that subtly it is not God that remains at the center but the quality of our giving. Are we singing worthily of the Lord? Do the instrumentalists play with a quality befitting a gift to the Lord? Is the preaching a suitable offering to the Lord? And little by little the focus shifts off the utter indispensability of the Lord himself onto the quality of our performances. And we even start to define excellence and power in worship in terms of the technical distinction of our artistic acts. Nothing keeps God at the center of worship like the Biblical conviction that the essence of worship is deep, heartfelt satisfaction in him, and the conviction that the trembling pursuit of that satisfaction is why we are together.

Furthermore, this vision of worship prevents the pragmatic hollowing out of this holy act. If the essence of worship is satisfaction in God, then worship can't be a means to anything else. We simply can't say to God, “I want to be satisfied in you so that I can

have something else.” For that would mean that we are not really satisfied in God but in that something else. And that would dishonor God, not worship him.

But, in fact, for thousands of people, and for many pastors, the event of “worship” on Sunday morning is conceived of as a means to accomplish something other than worship. We “worship” to raise money; we “worship” to attract crowds; we “worship” to heal human hurts; to recruit workers; to improve church morale; to give talented musicians an opportunity to fulfill their calling; to teach our children the way of righteousness; to help marriages stay together; to evangelize the lost; to motivate people for service projects; to give our churches a family feeling.

In all of this we bear witness that we do not know what true worship is. Genuine affections for God are an end in themselves. I cannot say to my wife: “I feel a strong delight in you so that you will make me a nice meal.” That is not the way delight works. It terminates on her. It does not have a nice meal in view. I cannot say to my son, “I love playing ball with you—so that you will cut the grass.” If your heart really delights in playing ball with him, that delight cannot be performed as a means to getting him to do something.

I do not deny that authentic corporate worship may have a hundred good effects on the life of the church. It will, just like true affection in marriage, make everything better. My point is that to the degree that we do “worship” for these reasons, to that degree it ceases to be authentic worship. Keeping satisfaction in God at the center guards us from that tragedy.

### *World Missions: A Passion for God's Glory in the Joy of All Peoples*

**Implication #11.** If the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *world missions is a declaration of the glories of God among all the unreached peoples, with a view to gathering worshippers who magnify God through the gladness of radically obedient lives.* “Tell of his glory among the nations,” is one way to say the Great Commission (Ps. 96:3). “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,” is another way (Ps. 67:4).

They have one aim: the glory of God exalted in the gladness of the nations.

The apostle Paul combined the *glory* of God and the *gladness* of the nations by saying that the aim of the Incarnation was “to show God’s truthfulness . . . in order that the Gentiles might *glorify God* for his mercy. As it is written . . . ‘*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people*’” (Rom. 15:8-10, RSV). In other words, rejoicing in God and glorifying God are one, and that one thing is the aim of world missions.

### *We Get the Help, He Gets the Glory*

**Implication #12.** *Prayer is calling on God for help; so it is plain that he is gloriously resourceful and we are humbly and happily in need of grace.* The Giver gets the glory. We get help. That is the story of prayer. “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:15, RSV). Jesus said to aim at two things in prayer: your joy and God’s glory. “Ask and you will receive, so that *your joy* may be made full” (John 16:24). “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that *the Father may be glorified* in the Son” (John 14:13). These are not two aims, but one. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, the Lord is glorified in giving the desires of our heart (Ps. 37:4).

### *Scholarship: Seeing and Savoring God in Every Branch of Learning*

**Implication #13.** *The task of Christian scholarship is to study reality as a manifestation of God’s glory, to speak about it with accuracy, and to savor the beauty of God in it.* I think Edwards would regard it as a massive abdication of scholarship that so many Christians do academic work with so little reference to God. If all the universe and everything in it exists by the design of an infinite, personal God, to make his manifold glory known and loved, then to treat any subject without reference to God’s glory is not scholarship but insurrection.

Moreover, the demand is even higher: Christian scholarship must be permeated by spiritual affections for the glory of God in all things. Most scholars know that without the support of truth, affections degenerate into groundless emotionalism. But not as



many scholars recognize the converse: that without the awakening of true spiritual affections, seeing the fullness of truth in all things is impossible. Thus Edwards says, "Where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things."<sup>51</sup>

One might object that the subject matter of psychology or sociology or anthropology or history or physics or chemistry or English or computer science is not "divine things" but "natural things." But that would miss the first point: to see reality in truth we must see it in relation to God, who created it, and sustains it, and gives it all the properties it has and all its relations and designs. To see all these things in each discipline is to see the "divine things"—and in the end, they are the main things. Therefore, Edwards says, we cannot see them, and therefore we cannot do Christian scholarship, if we have no spiritual sense or taste for God—no capacity to apprehend his beauty in the things he has made.

This sense, Edwards says, is given by God through supernatural new birth, effected by the Word of God. "The first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration, is to give the heart a divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the divine nature."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, to do Christian scholarship, a person must be born again; that is, a person must not only *see* the effects of God's work, but also *savor* the beauty of God's nature.

It is not in vain to do rational work, Edwards says, even though everything hangs on God's free gift of spiritual life and sight. The reason is that "the more you have of a rational knowledge of divine things, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be breathed into your heart, to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *The Religious Affections*, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, in: *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. by Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> "Christian Knowledge," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 162.

It is evident here that what Edwards means by “rational knowledge” is not to be confused with modern *rationalism* that philosophically excludes “divine things.” Even more relevant for the present issue of Christian scholarship is the fact that “rational knowledge” for Edwards would also exclude a Christian *methodological imitation* of rationalism in scholarly work. Edwards would, I think, find some contemporary Christian scholarship methodologically unintelligible because of the *de facto* exclusion of God and his word from the thought processes. The motive of such scholarship seems to be the obtaining of respect and acceptance in the relevant guild. But the price is high. And Edwards would, I think, question whether, in the long run, compromise will weaken God-exalting, Christian influence, because the concession to naturalism speaks more loudly than the goal of God’s supremacy in all things. Not only that, the very nature of reality will be distorted by a scholarship that adopts a methodology that does not put a premium on the ground, the staying power, and the goal of reality, namely, God. Where God is methodologically neglected, faithful renderings of reality will be impossible.

How then is this view of Christian scholarship an outworking of the truth that the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing? God exhibits his glory in the created reality being studied by the scholar (Ps. 19:1; 104:31; Col. 1:16-17). Yet God’s end in this exhibition is not realized if the scholar does not see it and savor it. Thus the savoring, relishing, and delighting of the scholar in the beauty of God’s glory is an occasion when the exhibition of the glory is completed. In that moment, the two become one: the magnifying of God’s glory is in and through the seeing and savoring of the scholar’s mind and heart. When the echo of God’s glory echoes in the affections of God’s scholar and resounds through his speaking and writing, God’s aim for Christian scholarship is achieved.

### *God Is Glorified When Death Is Gain*

**Implication #14.** *The way to magnify God in death is by meeting death as gain.* Paul said his passion was that “Christ be exalted in [his] body, whether by life or by death.” And then he added the words that show how Christ would be exalted in his death: “For

to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21). Christ is shown as great, when death is seen as gain. The reason for this is plain: the glory of Christ is magnified when our hearts are more satisfied in him than in all that death takes from us. If we count death gain, because it brings us closer to Christ (which is what Phil. 1:23 says it does), then we show that Christ is more to be desired than all this world can offer.

*The Great Duty: Be as Happy as You Can—in God Forever*

**Implication #15.** Finally, if the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then, as C. S. Lewis said, "*It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*"<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Edwards expressed this duty with tremendous forcefulness in one of his seventy resolutions before he was twenty years old: "Resolved, To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of."<sup>55</sup> And, of course, the duty is established by explicit commands of Scripture: "Delight yourself in the LORD" (Ps. 37:4); "Serve the LORD with gladness" (Ps. 100:2); "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4); and many more.

Sometimes people ask: should we pursue obedience to God or joy in God? Edwards would answer: The question involves a category confusion. It's like asking: should I pursue fruit or apples? Obedience is doing what we are told. And we are told to delight ourselves in the Lord. Therefore pursuing joy in God *is* obedience. In fact, when the psalm says, "Serve the Lord with gladness," it implies that the pursuit of joy must be part of *all* our obedience, which is what Implication #4 above already said. It could not be otherwise if joy in God is essential to magnifying the surpassing worth of God.

I hope it is evident now that this duty to be satisfied in God is not just a piece of good advice for the sake of our mental health.

<sup>54</sup> From a personal letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken's book, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 189.

<sup>55</sup> Resolution #22 in Edwards's *Memoirs*, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh), p. xxi.

It is rooted in the very nature of God as one who overflows with the glory of his fullness, which is magnified in being known and loved and enjoyed by his creatures. Which is why I say again that this discovery has made all the difference in my life. What I owe Jonathan Edwards for guiding me in these things is incalculable. I love his words, “The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.”<sup>56</sup> But I also love to say it my way: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

### *A Final Plea and Prayer*

Edwards’s central insight—that God created the world to exhibit the fullness of his glory in the God-centered joy of his people—has made all the difference for me. Aside from all the other riches in Edwards’s vision of God this alone would warrant Charles Colson’s recommendation of Jonathan Edwards:

The western church—much of it drifting, enculturated, and infected with cheap grace—desperately needs to hear Edwards’s challenge. . . . It is my belief that the prayers and work of those who love and obey Christ in our world may yet prevail as they keep the message of such a man as Jonathan Edwards.<sup>57</sup>

O how I pray that these words, and all that I have written, will persuade many of you to read and embrace Edwards’s great vision of God’s passion for his glory in *The End for Which God Created the World*, printed as the second part of this book!

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<sup>56</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, ¶ 72 and footnote 40.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Colson, “Introduction” to Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), pp. xxiii, xxxiv.